

Mohs Surgery

Mohs surgery is one of the best ways to treat skin cancer. This handout answers some questions you may have about Mohs surgery. If you have other questions, please do not hesitate to call us at **781-744-8348**.

What is Mohs surgery?

Mohs surgery is a special type of surgery to remove skin cancer. The goal of Mohs is to remove all of the skin cancer while removing as little healthy skin around the cancer as possible. This will cause less scarring.

During the surgery, your doctor will remove skin that has cancer cells and then look at it under a microscope. Your doctor will repeat these steps until only healthy skin is left.

Unlike other treatments, Mohs lets your doctor remove **both** the parts of skin cancer he or she can see and the parts that can only be seen under a microscope. This means that all of the cancer can be removed in one procedure. (Your doctor does not have to wait for someone to study the removed skin days later.) As a result, Mohs is more likely than other treatments to cure skin cancer.



How do I know if Mohs surgery is right for me?

Your dermatologist can help you decide if Mohs surgery is right for you. It might be an option if:

- A biopsy (piece of tissue that is removed and checked under a microscope) shows that you have skin cancer
- Your skin cancer is in an area where we want to leave as much healthy skin as possible, such as the face, scalp, neck, hands, feet or genitals
- Your skin cancer has come back after being treated before
- Your skin cancer has edges that are hard to define
- Your skin cancer is large or is growing quickly
- You have a type of skin cancer that has cancer cells along its edges that can't be seen without a microscope

What can I expect during Mohs surgery?

First, you'll meet the surgery team, which is made up of nurses, the doctor and other doctors in training. The team will look at your skin cancer and will describe the surgery to you based on what they see. You will have the chance to ask questions at this time as well as during the surgery. Then the following will happen:

1. A medication called a local anesthetic will be injected into the area being treated. This medication numbs the skin, so you won't feel anything during the surgery. (This step is like the skin biopsy you had.)
2. Once the area is numbed, your doctor will remove a piece of skin that has cancer cells he or she can see, along with a little skin that looks healthy. Your doctor will draw a detailed picture of the removed skin (called a Mohs map). This map helps your doctor keep track of the exact spot where the skin was removed.
3. A bandage will be placed over the area. You can then go back to the waiting area.
4. The removed skin (sample) and the map are brought to the lab. A technician prepares the skin sample so your doctor can look at it under the microscope. The sample is cut into sections, which lets your doctor look at them from many different angles. This is the longest step in the Mohs surgery. It often takes an hour or more.
5. Your doctor will look carefully at the skin samples under a microscope. He or she will see whether the cancer has been removed completely or whether any cancer remains on the outer edges of the skin. Your doctor marks on the map any cancer that remains.



- If your doctor sees cancer cells, he or she will remove another piece of skin. Using the map that was made, your doctor can tell where the tumor still is and will remove more skin from that area only. Your doctor will look at the skin under the microscope. He or she will keep removing pieces of skin from the area until he or she does not find any more cancer cells.

After the cancer is removed, you and your doctor will talk about the best way for your wound to heal. Based on the size of your wound, you may need stitches. If the wound is small, it may be able to heal by itself. If you have a larger wound, you may need a skin flap or graft. This is when healthy skin from somewhere else on your body is used to cover the wound to help it heal.

Steps to Mohs Surgery

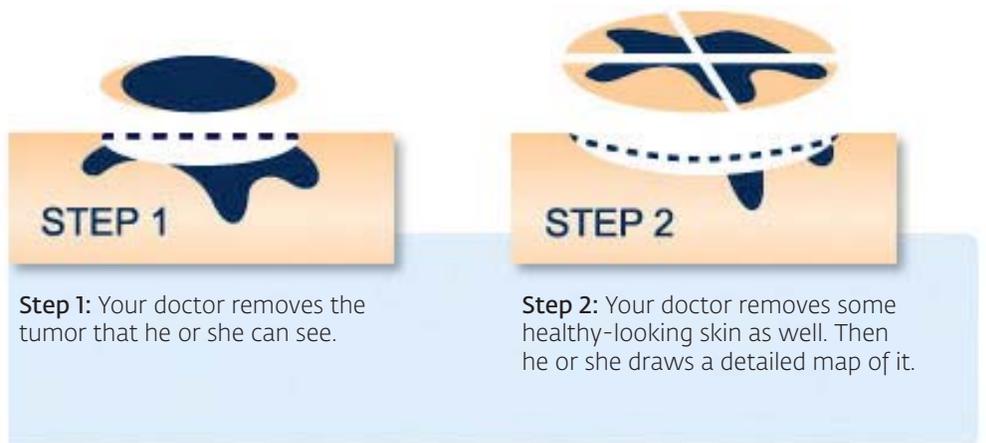
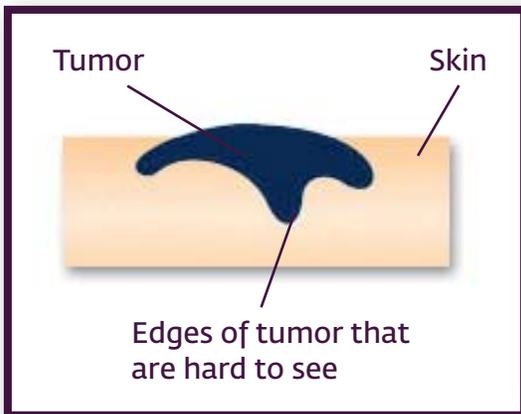


Image adapted from American College of Mohs Surgeons

How long does Mohs surgery take?

Mohs surgery takes time. Removing the skin seems to go quickly. But it does take quite some time for the lab to prepare the tissue and for your doctor to look at it. Because we can't tell ahead of time how many times we'll need to remove skin, please plan on staying with us for the whole day. You will be able to go home after the surgery.

Is the surgery painful?

The surgery usually causes very little pain. Most patients find that Tylenol (acetaminophen) helps their pain in the days after surgery. But stronger pain medications can be prescribed if you need them. You will need to avoid strenuous activity, such as exercise or heavy yardwork, while you have a bandage on your wound. This is usually for 1-2 weeks, based on where on your body you had surgery.

What are the benefits of Mohs surgery?

There are many benefits to Mohs surgery:

- Mohs surgery can cure about 99% of most skin cancers. This is higher than any other type of treatment for skin cancer.
- For the most part, only skin that has cancer cells is removed. This leaves as much of your healthy skin behind as possible and helps lessen scarring.
- Mohs is done with local anesthesia (medication used to numb the area being treated). You won't be put to sleep, as you would with general anesthesia. Because of this, you avoid some of the side effects from general anesthesia (such as feeling sick or tired or foggy) and should have a quicker recovery.



What are the risks of Mohs surgery?

As with any surgery, Mohs surgery carries some risks. These include the following:

- Scarring. All surgeries leave a scar. Mohs doctors are specially trained to help make your scar as inconspicuous (not noticeable) as possible. The size and shape of the scar is based on the size, shape and location of your skin cancer.
- Bleeding from the wound, especially 48 hours after surgery
- Bleeding under the stitches. If this happens, we'll have to open the wound to stop the bleeding.
- Pain or tenderness around the wound
- Wound infection (which can be easily treated with antibiotics)
- Allergic reaction to the bandage placed over the wound
- Numbness, itching or shooting pain around the treated area
- Weakness in the treated area. This usually lasts a short while but can last forever in rare cases.
- A scar that becomes wider over time
- Cancer coming back

Thank you for choosing Lahey Hospital and Medical Center for your care. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to call us. For more information on Mohs Surgery, please visit these web sites:

www.skincancermohssurgery.org

www.mohscollege.org